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Interobjectivity: The Collective Roots of Individual Consciousness and Social Identity

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The Mind of the universe is social. (Marcus Aurelius, 180/1964, p. 88)

The three arguments developed in this chapter are related through their common support for a more social approach in psychology. By "more social" I mean an approach that reflects the collective processes associated with the collaboratively constructed and mutually upheld nature of social reality (following Bruner, 1986; Harré, 2002; see also Postmes, Baray, Haslam, Morton, & Swaab, Chapter 12 in this volume). First, I argue that social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) is compatible with a cultural account of behavior. Second, I contend that the conception of the individual central to social identity theory entails assumptions that leave sufficient room for cultural variations. Third, I articulate an example of how a cultural perspective suggests new directions in which social identity theory and research could further develop.

Social identity theory emerged as part of a larger movement toward achieving a non-reductionist psychology (the wider historical and ideological background to the theory is reflected in Israel & Tajfel, 1972; Sampson, 1977). The theory has stimulated an impressive body of research that comes under the broad umbrella of "the social identity tradition" (e.g., see Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Robinson, 1996; Worchel, Morales, Páez, & Deschamps, 1998) as well as self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) and other theoretical offshoots (some of them reflected in the chapters of this text, e.g., Pickett & Leonardelli, Chapter 4). However, because of space limitations I address mainly the original theory of intergroup conflict and change.

I begin by clarifying what I mean by "a cultural perspective". This clarification is necessary because of considerable divergence in cultural perspectives in recent years (Moghaddam & Studer, 1997). In the second section, I explore the compatibility of social identity theory with the cultural perspective I adopt. The third section, the longest in the chapter, examines assumptions underlying the concept of the individual within social identity theory and how these assumptions allow for cultural variations. Finally, I discuss how a cultural perspective on rights and duties suggests extensions to social identity theory and research in the domain of social change and stability.

The cultural perspective of this chapter

The central feature of the cultural perspective that guides this discussion is the adoption of a normative rather than a causal account of human thought and action. Thus, my position stands in sharp contrast to both traditional psychology and traditional cross-cultural psychology (Moghaddam & Studer, 1997), which share the search for assumed causes (operationalized as independent variables) and their assumed effects (operationalized as dependent variables) on social behavior. The shift from behaviorism to cognition as the dominant paradigm in psychology has moved the search for "causes" from solely the stimuli in the environment to also include cognitive mechanisms assumed to function in the mind. But common to both behaviorism and cognitive psychology is the insistence that thought and action are causally determined. The limitations of such positivist cause–effect accounts have been convincingly articulated elsewhere (e.g., Harré, 2002), and need not be repeated here. Suffice to say that the positivist cause–effect account leaves no room for personal agency and intentionality.

An alternative normative account entails an understanding of individual choice not as an "effect" causally determined by assumed "underlying cognitive mechanisms" or by external factors, but as regulated by the norms, rules, and other aspects of the normative system that a person interprets to be appropriate in cultural context (see Moghaddam, 1998). In any given context the individual has available various normative systems within which to think and act correctly or incorrectly. For example, an individual who wants to position herself as a rebel in a Western society has a variety of choices, such as in terms of what to rebel against (e.g., classical music) and what "rebel" cause to take up (e.g., post-punk rock). Individual choices are made within constraints, and different degrees of freedom are present in different situations, so that more choices are available in some contexts than in others.

According to this normative account, regularity and predictability in behavior arise because most people most of the time consciously or unconsciously behave correctly according to the normative system dominant in their culture. For example, when participants enter an experimental laboratory, they search for guides as to how they should behave (often participants enter a laboratory and ask "What am I supposed to do?", as a way of seeking information about correct behavior). Most participants interpret the situation and "how they should behave" in a similar way to others who share their culture, and these are the participants whose behavior is used as data to yield "significant results". The other participants, usually a minority, who interpret the situation differently and behave in other ways (such as by deciding that they do not want to be in the experiment) contribute to error or variance in experimental results. Thus, culture guides behavior in the laboratory context, but does not "cause" individuals to behave in particular ways.

The cultural perspective that I am advocating does not negate the utility and value of the laboratory experiment as a research method in psychology. The laboratory has served a highly useful and, indeed, essential role in psychological research. It is the causal interpretation of findings rather than the laboratory method that is faulty (for a more in-depth discussion of the utility of the laboratory method in psychology, see Moghaddam & Harré, 1992).

Is social identity theory compatible with a cultural perspective?

Social identity theory is compatible with the cultural perspective advocated in this discussion, although mechanistic interpretations of the theory that have become dominant in the social identity tradition are not compatible with this cultural perspective. The theory has identified a series of preferences individuals tend to show in social life. From a cultural perspective, these preferences are regulated by belief structures and other important components of normative systems.

The point of departure for certain readings of social identity theory (e.g., Hogg & Abrams, 1988) is that individuals are assumed to have a preference for group membership that supports their proposed need for a positive and distinct identity. My interpretation is that this preference is learned through socialization processes, as individuals are taught that belonging to groups with positive and distinct identities is more rewarding, both in direct material ways and in less direct ways related to emotional support and social acceptance. For example, as a child enters school and moves in and out of different groups, she learns that membership in some

groups (e.g., the advanced math class, the winning swim team) brings with it far more positive reactions from her parents, teachers, friends, and so on, than membership in other groups (e.g., the "C" math class, the losing swim team).

Similarly, the child learns the "correct" way to think as a member of different types of groups, including sex, ethnic, and religious groups. This comes about through often subtle but powerful *carriers* – vehicles through which cultural values and "ways of doing things" are sustained, propagated, and moved forward from generation to generation (Moghaddam, 2002). Examples of symbolic carriers are national flags, team mascots, tribal colors and costumes. Other carriers include various scripted practices and rituals, such as initiation ceremonies and the like, and rules about how an individual can correctly enter into and exit from different groups.

From a cultural perspective, social identity theory has postulated certain preferences individuals show in different intergroup contexts. That is, for example, if individuals are members of a group that already enjoys positive and distinct identity they will prefer one kind of strategy (i.e., to try to maintain the *status quo*), but if their group membership leads to inadequate social identity they will prefer other behavioral options (e.g., try to exit from the group). Again, such preferences are acquired during the course of socialization and are dependent on cultural conditions, training, and dominant belief structures. This interpretation is more in line with Tajfel's broader writings than an interpretation based on genetic factors or inheritance more broadly (for a more in-depth discussion of Tajfel's broader approach, see Billig, 1996). From a cultural perspective, a key research question concerns the extent to which the identified preferences actually are consistent across cultures, a topic on which there is as yet little serious research (for an exception, see Wetherell, 1982).

Thus, the general approach adopted by social identity theory is compatible with the cultural approach advocated in this chapter. Next, I turn to consider more specifically the fit between the conception of the individual central to social identity theory and this cultural perspective.

The individual within the social identity tradition and SIT

The conception of the individual central to SIT entails five main sets of assumptions that are particularly noteworthy from a cultural perspective. In this section, I identify these assumptions and show how they leave room for cultural variations in conceptions of the individual.

Positive and distinct identity

A first assumption is that the individual is motivated to achieve a positive and distinct identity. The theory does not postulate the particular criteria according to which the positiveness and distinctiveness of identity are evaluated.

Cultural research suggests that "positive and distinct identity" is not a fixed idea in an individual's head, but should be viewed as a set of collaborative social practices that vary depending on the context and interlocutors. Such practices are used to try to position oneself in relation to others, to achieve particular presentations of oneself, as more or less like others for example, depending on who the interlocutors are and what the context is (see discussions in Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). For example, in supposedly "more conformist" societies such as Germany and Japan, individuals showed less conformity than Americans (a supposedly "low conformist" society) in the standard Asch-type experimental situations (see Moghaddam, 1998, Chapter. 7). A plausible explanation for this finding is that although Germans and Japanese may be more conformist than Americans within certain ingroups (such as family, close friends, and work colleagues), they are less conformist when interacting with strangers (as is the case in the typical psychology experiment). Such processes suggest that motivation, to conform for example, is not something fixed within an individual, but is manifested in ongoing social practices that vary across contexts (see the related discussion by Halloran and Kashima, Chapter 8 in this volume, on how culture moderates the ways in which identities are being expressed). By implication, how motivated an American, German, Japanese, or any other person is to achieve a positive and distinct identity is context dependent. So too are the attributes or "criteria" of the positive and distinct identity.

Of course, a complicating factor is that the context itself changes. I am writing the final draft of this chapter in China, where rapid change has been the most salient feature of society for the last half century. The cultural revolution of the late 1960s and the "perpetual revolution" launched by Chairman Mao Zedong have been overtaken by a state-sponsored market economy and the emergence of a super-rich capitalist elite in the "New China" of the twenty-first century. A "positive and distinct" identity in the context of the cultural revolution meant something completely different from a "positive and distinct" identity in the context of the New China, characterized as it is in many ways by unbridled "wild west" capitalism.

As regards the criteria according to which individuals evaluate positiveness and distinctiveness, enormous variations are suggested by cultural research. Consider, for example, the range of physical characteristics

that have been selected to serve as criteria. The most pervasive in Western societies is skin color, on the basis of which the social world is divided into "black" and "white". However, such criteria are "arbitrary", in the sense that they are not objectively selected, and infinite other possibilities are also available. Consider, for example, the division of the social world in Rwanda on the basis of height (Maquet, 1961), and the even more intriguing division between "long-ears" and "short-ears" on ancient Easter Island (Heyerdahl, 1989). In all such cases, social categorization is based on objectively measurable differences, which are transformed into social criteria by the majority group wielding power. For example, the "one drop" rule as practiced by whites in the United States defined "black" as any individual with even "one drop" of "black blood". Such a rule was clearly designed to maximize the size of the population who could be defined as slaves, and later as "colored" (and thus be disenfranchised).

By implication, through the manufacture and manipulation of different criteria for evaluating positive and distinct identity, the majority group can determine *rights*, demands placed on others by the person who possesses them, and *duties*, demands placed by others on the person who owes them, with respect to how the members of different groups will assess their social identity.

Social identity integral to personal identity

Social identity is defined as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). There are at least two key issues left open: first, the question of how many groups a person belongs to; second, how strong are the value and emotional significance attached to membership(s) (these issues are to some degree addressed in self-categorization theory and research, where it is assumed people have networks of identities they draw from). Enormous cultural variations exist in both of these areas.

First, on the matter of how many groups an individual belongs to, consider the range of possibilities between the extremes of *mono-group societies*, where membership in one group dominates life and fundamentally influences the behavior of all or most individuals in that society in all domains, and *multi-group societies*, where the influence of membership in many different groups with diverse characteristics has different levels of influence on the behavior of different individuals. An example of a society closer to the mono-group extreme is the Islamic Republic of Iran, where for Shi'i Muslims the importance of membership in the group "Shi'i Muslim" is in practice by far the most important group membership (see

Moghaddam, 2004a). This is because the rules and practices of Shi'i Islam are used to regulate official Iranian government policy, as well as the minute details of everyday social life, such as the clothing people are allowed to wear, the names they are allowed to give to their children, what they are permitted to eat, who they can shake hands with, who they can socialize with, how many wives a man can have at one time and whether he can have "permanent" or "temporary" wives. Even though an individual in the Islamic Republic of Iran can be a member of many different groups, membership in the group "Shi'i Muslim" in practice dominates all other memberships. An example of a society closer to the multi-group end of the continuum is the United States, where conformity is no less than in most other major societies (Moghaddam, 1998, Chapter 7), but membership in no one group has a dominating influence on all or most individuals in that society. In the United States, there are a greater variety of subcultures with different normative systems, such as those relating to sexual orientation, than in Iran, but conformity is *not necessarily weaker* (1998, pp. 240–241).

There is also diversity in the sheer number of groups individuals belong to in different cultures. In most large modern societies multiple group membership is the norm, with family, social, professional, recreational, political, religious, cultural, and other group affiliations competing to influence the individual. However, at the other extreme are examples of much smaller societies where individuals belong to far fewer groups. The clearest cases of this are isolated smaller societies, contemporary examples being the Tibetan Nyinba in the Himalayan mountains (Levine, 1988), the Old Order Amish of Pennsylvania (USA) (Hostetler, 1980), and the Yanomamo who live in the Amazon jungle in Brazil and Venezuela (Chagnon, 1992); but there are even more numerous historical examples, such as the Tiwi of northern Australia (Hart, Pilling, & Goodale, 2001).

By implication, in mono-group societies individuals have a duty to follow the normative practices of one or two groups in all areas of life, and social identity is based in important ways on just those one or two groups; whereas in multi-group societies individuals have the right to practice different lifestyles and develop a social identity that is founded on multiple diverse groups. This has important implications for the range of options available for expressing individuality and personal freedoms within a cultural context.

Second, on the issue of the value and emotional significance attached to group membership, on the surface it would seem that higher individualism should be associated with lower value and emotional significance to group attachment. After all, Hofstede (1991) defines individualism as pertaining to "societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is

expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family"
(p. 51). By contrast, collectivism pertains to societies "in which people
from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups" (p. 51).
Accordingly, we should find that in more individualistic societies, indi-
viduals have weaker attachments to groups. This seems to be in line with
arguments from communitarians warning of weakening social ties in the
United States and other "individualistic" Western societies (e.g., see
Etzioni, 1993), as well as empirical evidence from Putnam (2000) and
other political scientists in support of the argument that in the United
States, the epitome of an individualistic society, more people are "bowling
alone" and refraining from affiliation with all kinds of groups. However,
the actual cross-cultural picture is more complicated.

Part of the complexity arises out of the processes of increasing special-
ization associated with modernization (Moghaddam, 1997). Increasing
divisions of labor lead to a paradoxical situation, in the sense that more
specialized individuals are more dependent on others to complete "whole"
tasks and to function effectively. The United States and other industrially
advanced societies are individualistic, yet they pursue a goal of "collective
actualization" to try to maximize "how each person can most effectively
develop specialized talents specifically in the narrow domains needed for
group functioning. In the pursuit of this collective ideal, the criterion for
development becomes the requirement on individuals to function effec-
tively in the integrated dynamic structures of the collectivity ... The main
objective of socialization ... is to develop individual talents to better meet
market demands" (Moghaddam, 1997, pp. 4–5). An implication of this
argument is that we should differentiate between individualism–
collectivism at the level of the individual and at the level of the larger soci-
ety, and this is in line with other recent interpretations (see Oyserman, Coon,
& Kemmelmeier, 2002): increasing individualism at the individual level
need not translate to individualism at the cultural level, and vice versa.

An implication for social identity theory is that increased individual-
ism, at least at the level of the individual, need not translate into weaker
value and emotional significance attached to group membership. This idea
receives tentative empirical support from a recent correlational study that
assessed the relationship between individualism–collectivism and indices
of group affiliation across the different states of the United States, as well
as across 42 different countries around the world (Allik & Realo, 2004).
The results support the view that as individuals become more individual-
istic, they also become more dependent on others. This seemingly para-
doxical relationship reflects the "plight of the individual in the age of
individualism" (Moghaddam, 1997), and should be a rewarding area of
social identity research in the future (see also the related discussion on

individualism and identification in Jetten & Postmes, Chapter 7 in this volume).

Social comparisons determine adequacy of identity

The theory assumes that individuals in making intergroup comparisons come to an idea about the positiveness and distinctiveness of the groups to which they belong. Presumably, through "social creativity" groups can reconstruct the basis and dimensions of social comparisons. However, in the social identity tradition too little consideration is given to local normative systems that guide the individual to make some types of intergroup comparisons and not others.

Each culture guides individuals to make some types of intergroup comparisons rather than others. There is considerable cultural diversity with respect to the targets that are identified as "correct". Consider, for example, comparisons across gender groups. In many Western societies, women are encouraged (particularly by some feminists) to compete with men and to compare their status and rewards not only with other women but also with men (of course, not all women make comparisons across gender lines, and even those who do also make many other types of comparisons). Thus, there are annual publications reporting the average earnings of women and men in different professions, and statistics reporting scholastic achievements of women and men from elementary school to graduate programs. In contrast, women in Islamic societies are encouraged (particularly by government authorities) to see themselves as having a complementary rather than a competitive relationship with men ("like the two wings of a bird, men and women complement one another"). There is an absence of debates about issues such as "same salary for same work" and the like. The same kind of within-gender (rather than cross-gender) social comparisons are normative in many smaller traditional societies, such as the Old Order Amish, the Yanomamo, the Tiwi, and the Tibetan Nyinba.

A closer examination of some traditional societies reveals more subtle cultural variations in comparison targets. For example, in both modern Western societies and in traditional Tiwi culture, it is not proper for young men to compare themselves with old men on the criterion of how much access they have to young women (as girlfriends, companions, wives). But this similarity hides a subtle difference. In Western societies young men have greater access to young women than do old men. In traditional Tiwi society, however, young men have far less access to young women than do old men. This is because in traditional Tiwi society men can only attain a wife after achieving a high level of status and resources, which typically

only comes about in the early 30s. Moreover, the first wife of a "young" man is typically a much older widow. However, as a man works his way up the status hierarchy and gains greater resources, he marries younger and younger wives (men can have many wives, and every woman is married all of her life, from birth to death). The Tiwi normative system favors older men; while there is little possibility of a man marrying in his 20s, he typically acquires many young wives when he reaches his 50s. Thus, social comparison targets for both young Western males and young Tiwi males is other young rather than older males, but for very different reasons.

By implication, individual group members have rights and duties to make some types of social comparisons, and not others. Such rights and duties reflect majority group interests, such as "old men" in traditional Tiwi society.

Perceived stability and legitimacy determine availability of cognitive alternatives

Whether or not an individual perceives alterative ways of organizing inter-group relations is postulated by SIT as being dependent on the perceived legitimacy and stability of the present situation. The bases for evaluating stability and legitimacy are not specified, nor is the extent to which instability and illegitimacy would have to be perceived for cognitive alternatives to arise. Finally, the priorities given to different cognitive alternatives remain open.

Considerable cultural variation exists with respect to the basis used to evaluate stability and legitimacy in society. In contemporary Western societies, democratic ideals suggest that stability and legitimacy rest on representative government. In theory, those who win elections govern on behalf of the people, and stability is ensured through smooth transitions from one election to the next. In practice, there is variation as to how such ideals are put into practice, as evident in the United States Presidential elections of 2000 that brought George W. Bush to power. Thus, even within Western democracies, there are considerable differences in how stability and legitimacy play out. Consider now a dramatically different system, that of the Islamic Republic of Iran, where the constitution stipulates that a "supreme Islamic leader", or a council of "Islamic leaders", will oversee all government laws and actions, to ensure that there is no deviation from "true Islam". In this case, representatives elected by popular vote are subordinate to, and only gain legitimacy through, religious authorities.

But to appreciate the deeper difference between legitimacy in Iran and in Western societies, we must consider in greater detail the concept of leadership in each context (Moghaddam, 2004a). In Iran, every practicing

Shi'i Muslim is obligated to select a *marja-i-taqlid*, "a source of emulation", a religious leader who literally will act as an example and guide for how to live, including every detail of daily life. For the Shi'i faithful, the legitimacy and stability of the world are defined by the *marja-i-taqlid*, from the realm of macro social and political events, to the details of how to wash and eat. Even those Iranians who do not routinely practice Shi'i Islam are nevertheless influenced by the normative system put into place by major religious leaders in their society. This leads to complex and subtle points about continuity of cultural systems, and the issue of how much *perceptions* of stability and legitimacy can be influential (see also the discussions of individual/group perceptions by Reicher and Haslam, Chapter 13 in this volume).

SIT gives considerable importance to perceptions of stability and legitimacy, but evidence from studies of revolutions suggests that social practices may continue despite changed perceptions (Moghaddam & Crystal, 1997). These include detailed analysis of revolutions, from the great French revolution (Schama, 1989) to more recent ones in Iran and elsewhere (see Moghaddam, 2004a). Middlebrook (1995) termed this the "paradox of revolution" – the continuity of the "same old" social practices after a major revolution, so that "the more things change, the more they stay the same". This continuity is sustained by carriers, discussed earlier in this chapter. Carriers such as flags, traditions, status symbols, informal norms and rules, act as "conveyers" of social practices; carriers inform people about "what to do", "when to do", and "how to do", in everyday contexts (Moghaddam, 2002). They sustain belief structures and the "mundane" everyday social practices that act as a break and as a limitation on revolutionary programs.

By implication, local cultural carriers can effectively maintain traditional social practices in intergroup relations, despite perceptions of instability and illegitimacy, and even after major revolutions. The social identity tradition should give more attention to continuity and what remains the same at the individual and interpersonal levels in informal life, despite changes in formal macro political and economic systems (the issue of change and continuity is further discussed in the final section of this chapter).

Change-seeking strategies

SIT articulates a range of strategies individuals adopt in order to try to maintain or improve a positive and distinct identity. Depending on the characteristics of the intergroup situation (for example, whether exit from a minority group is possible and whether cognitive alternatives to the

present intergroup situation are perceived), such strategies range from the normative and individualistic, as in the case of making intragroup comparisons, to the non-normative and collective, as in the case of directly and collectively challenging the majority group. The theory assumes causal relations between belief structures and the strategies preferred by individuals, and this leaves the door wide open for cultural variations.

Clearly the strategies given priority by an individual are influenced by the belief structures dominant in society. For example, the theory postulates that when the situation is perceived as unstable and illegitimate, the individual will select one of the following strategies: individual mobility, social creativity (which has three dimensions: finding a new dimension of comparison, changing values assigned to attributes of the ingroup, and engaging in comparison with a different outgroup), and social competition. The choice of strategy is not made by the individual in isolation, as is suggested by the image of the lone participant calculating the "best strategy" in paper-and-pencil laboratory tests. Rather, both what are understood to be available strategies, and selection from among them, are achieved though social interactions, collective discourse, and collaborative negotiation. The outcome of these processes is fundamentally influenced by the narratives pervasive in society, as reflected by the emphasis on belief structures in social identity theory. For example, in the United States the "American dream" narrative is particularly pervasive, involving the idea that "anyone can make it in America", that through self-help and personal responsibility any individual can rise to the top positions in society. Associated with this emphasis on individual social mobility are campaigns by powerful economic interest groups against labor unions, government intervention, and social welfare generally, leading to what has been described as a "winner-takes-all society" (Frank & Cook, 1995). The individual, then, comes to appropriate a strategy through participation in collective social life, and through the unequal influence of various minority and majority groups.

By implication, then, in order to understand the actual preferences an individual shows between strategies, it is necessary to consider the shared understandings both within and between groups that typically enjoy unequal power and influence, and this is what I turn to next.

Interobjectivity and change: an example of a cultural extension to social identity theory

There is a fundamental difference between social identity theory, a theory of intergroup conflict and social *change processes*, and the social identity tradition, a body of literature that has tended to neglect social change

specifically and collective processes of meaning-making more broadly. From the cultural perspective adopted in this chapter, a vital and invaluable feature of social identity theory is the concern with changing intergroup situations and the preferences individuals show, through the influence of belief structures, for different behavioral options in the context of such changes. The fusion of social identity theory and a cultural perspective can help shift the focus back onto change processes and *collective meaning-making*, and indeed suggest ways in which further theory development could take place in the domain of change and stability.

In several ways social identity theory does address the "puzzle of change", related to the often repeated observation that "the more things change, the more they stay the same" (for a broader discussion of this puzzle, see Moghaddam, 2002, particularly Chapters 1–3 and 15). First, the theory posits that in cases where individuals are content with their social identity, they will make behavioral choices that serve to maintain the present intergroup situation. Presumably, in such contexts a great deal could change in terms of cultural, technological, and even economic and political facets of life, without necessarily changing the intergroup situation and the status and power hierarchy of groups. Second, from among the broad array of behavioral options identified as available to individuals who perceive themselves to have inadequate social identity, only one (collective action) has the potential to lead to social change, and it is the less likely option.

Thus, social identity theory suggests part of a solution to the puzzle of change to be the tendency of individuals to avoid collective action and to prefer individualistic strategies that sustain the *status quo*. But another part of a solution to the puzzle of change is suggested when we consider the role of multiple identities in the change processes.

Multiple social identities

Social identity theory presents a view of individuals as members of multiple groups and having multiple social identities. This is in agreement with the cultural perspective adopted in this chapter, where the emphasis is on choices made by individuals between competing normative systems associated with different groups within the same context (in contrast to traditional cross-cultural psychology, which typically presents a picture of a homogeneous culture acting as a cause of behavior). The social identity perspective of multiple social identities provides another possible solution to "the puzzle of change": change impacting on social identities at one level (e.g., the "macro" national level) need not impact on social identities at another level (e.g., the "micro" local level). For example, a revolution that creates disruptions at the macro level of national identity need not change social identities at the micro level of social relations within families.

Similarly, social identities might change at the level of an individual's intrafamily relations, without social identities at the national level being affected.

It may also be that social identities at the micro or macro levels are transformed, without disrupting other social identities at the same level but in a different sphere. For example, the feminist movement and transformations in gender roles may change Jane's social identity based on her being a woman, but not change her social identity based on her nationality (gender and nationality both being at the macro level, but in different spheres). But there are also cases where social identity based on membership in one group will influence changes in many other social identities, at different levels and in different spheres. Such cases are particularly instructive with respect to the sources of individual consciousness. Consider the case of Shi'i Islam in Iran, discussed earlier in this chapter. For Muslims in Iran, Shi'i Islam has become a *superordinate social identity*, one that embraces and impacts on all other social identities available in a context.

This has come about through the influence of the majority group, Islamic fundamentalists, who hold the reigns of power in Iran. The key point here is that social reality within all groups, particularly minority groups, is in major ways shaped by a majority group that monopolizes power (see also Postmes et al., Chapter 12; Reicher & Haslam, Chapter 13 in this volume).

How are power inequalities perpetuated?

The cultural perspective advocated here leads to an emphasis on *change processes* in intergroup relations and belief structures dominant within groups, and the question of how power inequalities are often perpetuated despite changes in the relative status of particular groups. The "paradox of revolution" is pervasive (although not inevitable): revolutionary groups often come to power only to perpetuate former inequalities (Moghaddam, 2002). Social identity theory already does provide some answers to this riddle, such as through the idea of multiple social identities (above), but another avenue for future research is to explore how belief structures dominant in minorities and majorities lead them to adopt particular rights and duties as priorities.

It is useful to begin a normative account of intergroup relations with two basic ideas. First, culture and the normative system precede the arrival of the individual and help shape individual consciousness. All individuals, no matter how powerful they later become as adults, begin life as helpless infants within the all-embracing normative system of a culture. More specifically, the groups into which individuals are born (e.g., woman, man;

black, white; Christian, Jew, Muslim) have a profound impact on the social constructions individuals acquire. Second, the cultures within which individuals are born vary in some important ways, including with respect to assumptions about the characteristics of individuals. Such differences are reflected in the literature on individualism–collectivism and elaborations such as the "horizontal–vertical" distinction (Nelson & Shavitt, 2002), but a more dynamic account is needed of the *processes* through which individuals come to share certain social constructions, such as those relating to justice, and more broadly the very conception of an individual.

In order to help explain the processes through which individuals become integrated into culture, and culture in individuals, I have introduced the concept of *interobjectivity*, the understandings that are shared within and between cultures about social reality (Moghaddam, 2003). Through socialization processes, individuals arrive at objectifications of the world based on the normative system of their cultures. They come to see their version of social reality as the correct one. But in many ways such understandings are not unique to their culture, nor are they shaped solely by the ingroup. In the case of minority groups, in particular, interobjectivity is shaped by powerful outgroups.

Interobjectivity highlights a fundamentally important feature of understandings shared within and across groups: such understandings arise out of *unequal* intergroup power relations. Some groups have more power than others, and are able to shape in important ways the understandings held by less powerful groups – a tendency discussed in various traditions under titles such as "false consciousness" (e.g., see Moghaddam, 1998, pp. 424–425; and the distinction between "groups-for-themselves" and "groups-in-themselves" in Billig, 1976). This process of unequal intergroup influence is reflected, for example, in understandings shared within and across groups with respect to rights and duties. Despite the centrality of rights and duties in relationships within and between groups, rights and duties remain almost completely neglected in research on groups (e.g., see contents of Brown & Gaertner, 2001; Ellemers et al., 1999).

Beliefs about what constitutes an individual are in large part based on the rights and duties ascribed to an individual (Moghaddam, 2000; Moghaddam & Riley, 2004; Moghaddam, Slocum, Finkel, Mor, & Harré, 2000). In practice, rights and duties are ascribed not just on the basis of individual characteristics, but also on the basis of group memberships. That is, the concept of an "abstract individual" with universal rights is severely tested by cultural variations. Consider, for example, cultural variations in rights reflected in polyandry and polygamy: among the Tibetan Nyinba a woman has the right to practice fraternal polyandry (i.e., marry several husbands who are brothers); in contrast, Shi'i Muslim men have

the right to practice a particular form of polygamy (to have up to four "permanent" wives and countless "temporary" wives).

The preferences identified by social identity theory are reflections of perceived rights and duties: for example, an individual perceiving it as her right to attempt individual mobility to try to exit from a lower status group in order to gain entrance to a higher status group, and the same individual perceiving it to be her duty to refrain from the "radical" path of collective action. In general, authorities maintain political stability by teaching individuals it is their right and their duty to "work within the existing system" rather than to take up collective action that might overturn the existing order. Revolutionaries, on the other hand, attempt to persuade people to adopt a redefinition of rights and duties, so that collective action takes priority over individual mobility. But what happens when revolutionaries do succeed and people do adopt collective action with the result that the majority group is toppled?

The reappearance of intergroup inequalities

On the surface, at least, it seems that cultural variations prevent us from proclaiming any universals with respect to rights and duties. However, a closer examination suggests a different picture. Ideas about rights and duties reflect intergroup inequalities: majority rather than minority groups define rights and duties as understood and shared across groups. For example, at the international level, Western conceptions of individual rights rather than alternative conceptions emphasizing collective rights have become influential (Finkel & Moghaddam, 2004). Historically, Western powers have defined rights and duties for all humankind, the economically rich for the economically poor, men for both men and women, whites for both whites and blacks, and so on.

However, rights and duties are not static, just as the concept of the individual and social relations are not static. Consider, for example, the rights and duties ascribed to children in contemporary Western societies. As the child develops and acquires notions of "rights" and "fairness", she makes demands such as "It's only fair that I go to the cinema with my friends". But her parents give priority to duties, as in "You can only go to the cinema after you've finished all your homework". When the child becomes an adult and has children of her own, the cycle of rights and duties resumes, and she now gives priority to duties when interacting with her own children. Thus, the concept of what the person is and what rights and duties she has changes, both in the larger society and in her own mind.

This has implications for intergroup relations that supplement the strategies identified by social identity theory. Specifically, the priority a

group gives to rights and/or duties can change across situations, particularly depending on changes in the relative power status of the group. A cycle of rights and duties has been identified: in situations of conflict and/or change, minority groups give priority to rights and majority groups give priority to duties (Moghaddam, 2003, 2004b). For example, since the 1960s a number of minorities have mobilized using slogans such as "women's rights", "Black rights", "gay rights" (rather than "women's duties", "Black duties", "gay duties"). Countering these minority movements, representatives of established majority group authority have emphasized duties, as in the duties of women, Blacks, and gays to abide by long established traditions ("family values", and the like). Similarly, revolutionaries attempting to seize power do so by appealing to rights, "the right to free speech", "the right to power sharing", and the like; while those in power evoke the "duties of citizens to obey the law" and maintain the status quo. However, when a minority group manages to come to power and achieve majority status, it shifts from giving priority to rights to giving priority to duties; just as the adult who once gave priority to rights as a child interacting with her parents now gives priority to duties as a parent interacting with her children.

Thus, the cultural perspective adopted here suggests several avenues through which the social identity tradition could constructively be expanded to provide a better solution to the "puzzle of change". A first avenue of future research is the relationship between multiple group memberships and change: change at one level and in one sphere of social identity need not influence change at other levels and spheres. Indeed, in some contexts change at macro levels of social identity may be resisted by stability in social identities at micro levels, helping to create the "paradox of revolution". A second avenue for future research is in the realm of rights and duties: the majority group is often able to define rights and duties for both majority and minority groups, but in times of conflict there is a tendency for majorities to give priority to duties and for minorities to give priority to rights. After revolutions, there is often a tendency for the new majority to shift from a priority of rights to one of duties, and for a minority (who still sees itself in a situation of conflict) to give priority to rights. This "cycle" is another part of the solution to the "paradox of revolution".

Concluding comment

SIT depicts individual thought and action as guided by belief structures, and this view is in line with the cultural perspective presented here. Belief structures are collaboratively constructed and collectively upheld; they arise out of social interactions, although they reside in individual persons. Moreover, belief structures are shaped by inequalities in the power of

different groups. The cultural perspective advocated here leads to a greater focus on interobjectivity and the question of how individual minority group members are often influenced by belief structures that reflect the interests of majority groups, particularly in relation to social change and perceived rights and duties.

NOTE

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